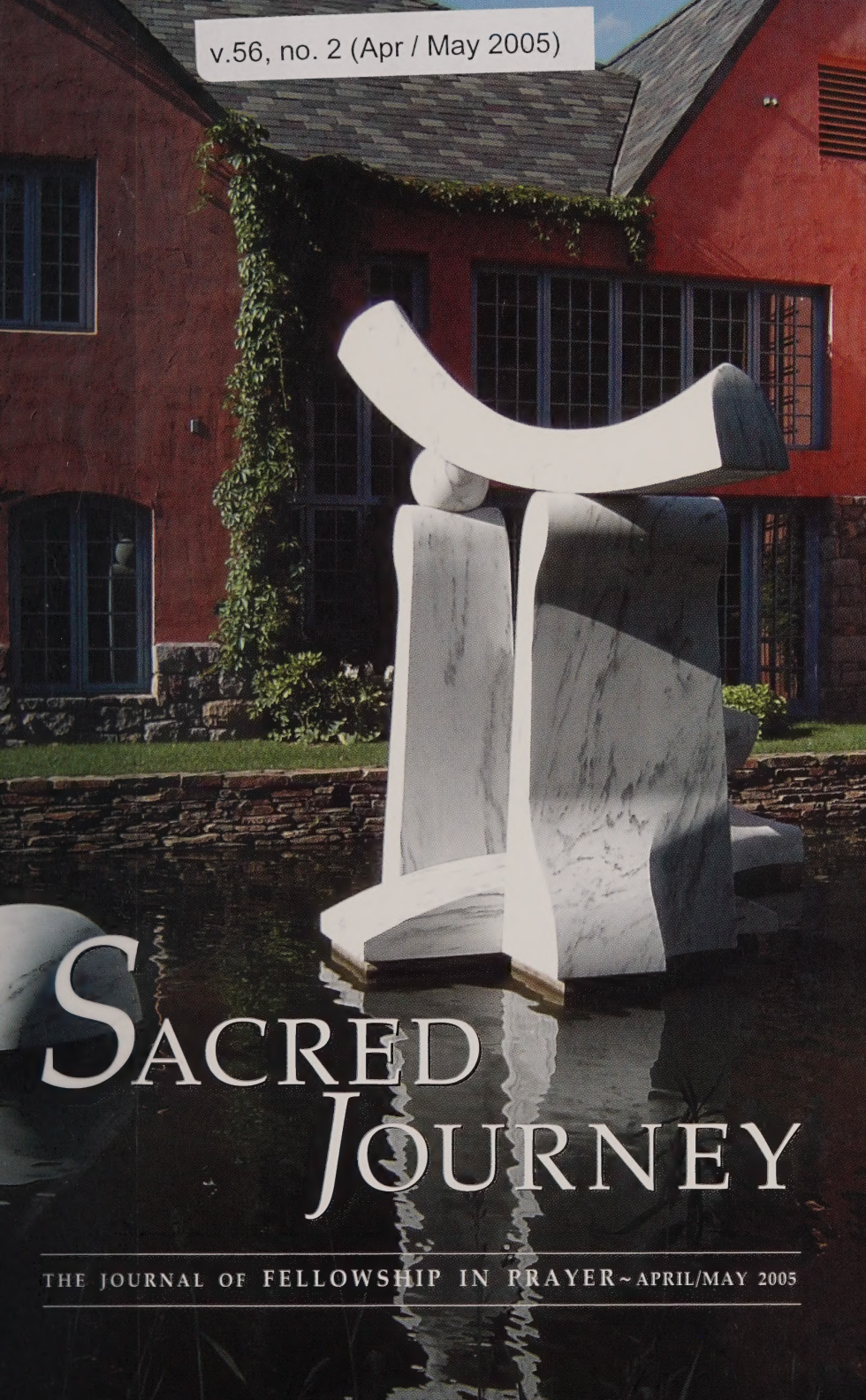


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SACRED JOURNEY

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER ~ APRIL/MAY 2005

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and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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Cover photo by Louise Hutner

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When Hope is Gone, Love Remains



"It is only through letting our heart break that we discover something unexpected: the heart cannot actually break, it can only break open. . . . When we feel both our love for this world and the pain of this world—together, at the same time—the heart breaks out of its shell. . . . To live with an open heart is to experience life full strength."

*~ John Welwood,
Love and Awakening*

I came across a story recently of the kind that always makes the heart ache—about the death of a child. The beauty and power of this story lies in its emphasis not only on the pain of loss but on the invaluable gift of love that can still be given when hope is gone.

As a father spends the final months with his young daughter who is dying of cancer, he remains hopeful through each more desperate attempt at treatment, and as each one fails, the day comes when there are none left to try. The father sits by his child's bed in utter hopelessness. He is forced to face the inevitable: her impending death. A nurse enters the room and, in the wisdom of her experience with dying patients, suggests to the father that even though hope is gone, love remains. As the father thinks about this, his despair and

grief give way to love and joy for the gift of his daughter, and together they fill their remaining days with more love than he could have imagined.

Our stories this month deal with variations on the theme of love in the “dark night of the soul,” of life’s mysteries and the unknown, and of our spiritual journey inward to seek God and Divine Love.

We feature Megan Don’s writings on St. Teresa of Avila who talks about our search to discover our true nature—to come to know our souls by looking within ourselves. Susan Gregg-Schroeder writes about her journey through depression, describing God’s grace in her “dark night of the soul,” and the “gifts of the shadow.” Gerald May describes the gifts of gratitude, praise, and pure pleasure he has felt during his life-threatening journey with lymphoma. Sarah Shapiro writes about the joy and beauty in nurturing new plant life in surroundings filled with daily death and destruction in Israel. And Connie Clark tells of the gifts of love, humility, and prayer she receives in her work as a chaplain with severely mentally ill patients.

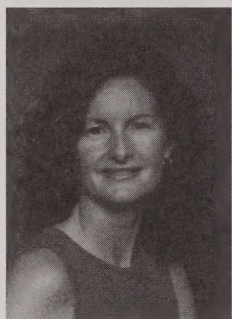
As John Welwood says above, “When we feel both our love for this world and the pain of this world—together, at the same time—the heart breaks out of its shell.” May your heart open to all of life—it’s pains and its joys—and may this opening allow the love at the center of your being to pour forth in deeper spiritual unity with all of life and with the Divine.

“Contemplative love is completely beyond comprehension. It is not love of some things to the exclusion of others, for that would be attachment. True love is like some infinite way of being that we become part of: a flowing energy of willingness, an eternal yes resounding with every heartbeat.”

~ Gerald May, *The Dark Night of the Soul*

O U R F E A T U R E
Teresa of Avila:
Falling Into the Arms of God

Megan Don



In recent weeks several books and articles relating to mystic traditions have found their way into our hands, including a series on five mystic poets (see our review on pg. 47). Two recurrent names in much of the literature we're receiving are St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. We're intrigued with a new book that takes an updated approach to thinking about and applying St. Teresa's teachings. Titled Falling into the Arms of God: Meditations on Teresa of Avila, by Megan Don, it will be released this April (see our review on page 46). We sense an ever-growing interest in the mystic traditions and so we offer you here a sampling of Megan Don's contemporary presentation of one of the most well-known of the Christian mystics.

Megan Don grew up in New Zealand. In her late teens she began several years of travel to pursue her interests in spirituality and mysticism. She traveled throughout India and the Middle East researching mystical traditions, including Hindu, Bhakti, and Islamic Sufi. At twenty-six she moved to Australia and converted to

Catholicism, becoming deeply involved in the Carmelite Order. She also studied comparative religions and psychoanalytical work at La Trobe University in Melbourne. In 2001 she visited Avila, Spain, to research St. Teresa for this book. Don is currently a doctoral candidate, and is a spiritual counselor and teacher.

(From) Introduction

Within oneself, very clearly, is the best place to look [for God] . . . and it's not necessary to go to heaven, nor any further than our own selves; for to do so is to tire the spirit and distract the soul, without gaining as much fruit. (Teresa of Avila, Collected Works, vol. I, 357)

Teresa of Avila understood that the mystery of the divine indwelling was available to all people. For her, contemplation was not restricted to nuns and monks. Likewise, she believed that engaging in an active life was not confined to those living in the secular world. Teresa's life provides us with an exceptional example of bringing the contemplative and active life together; it displays both a profound internal depth and an exceptionally productive outcome.

(From) Mystical Reality

We are all mystics slowly awakening to the reality of who we really are; that is, we are the children of heaven and earth, of spirit and matter, who are blessed both with heavenly and earthly experiences. God does not know the difference between these worlds, and we are all being given the opportunity to enter into this unity, if only we

will soften our hearts and cease to question God's infinite ways. The way of the mystic is a pathway to experiencing these ways of infinity, a pathway open to all.

How do we experience this unification that the true mystic experiences? Through surrendering to the spirit, wrote Teresa. The spirit of God, which is *our* very spirit, lays all the faculties of the soul to rest in a unified existence of peace and love, and in doing so, allows the transformation of the soul to occur. Herein lies the true nature of the mystic—a unity of being known through a spiritual metamorphosis. Further, the word *mystic* derives from the Latin *mysterium*, which means “to be altered.”

(From) Dwelling Place

As to what good qualities there may be in our souls, or Who dwells within them, or how precious they are—those are things which we seldom consider and so we trouble little about carefully preserving the soul's beauty. (Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle, 29)

Theresa often lamented the fact that we do not understand ourselves or know who we are. Becoming so bound up with our worldly identity, we forget about our divine nature. She used the example of our family life to illustrate her point. What if, she asked, having spent so many years as part of a family, we became unable to know who we were? What if we didn't know our name, who our mother and father was, or which town or country we lived in? What can we tell of our divine origins? To say we have souls because our

religious traditions have told us so is not good enough; we must actively enquire about, uncover, and come to know our souls.

Comparing the soul to a clear crystal castle with many rooms, Teresa wrote that there are “some above, others below, others at each side; and in the center and midst of them all is the chief mansion where the most secret things pass between God and the soul” (IC, 29). It is our divine responsibility, she maintained, to explore this castle, to come to know who resides at its center. And it is our responsibility to persevere with this ongoing discovery and eternal relationship that exists with our divine self. It is our duty to recognize how truly precious we are and to see all other beings as equally precious.

This is not a linear journey from the outer rooms to the center room. No, this journey is an eternal spiral. Sometimes we enter the room of past wounds, sometimes the room of peaceful meditation—there is no room where the door becomes closed, no matter how far we advance on our spiritual path. The room of humility is always ready for us to enter, and so too is the room where we see and know that we are a blessed child of God.

Teresa wrote, “There are many ways of being” (IC, 31). If we are intent on discovering our true nature, then we must also be prepared to enter all the rooms. To be sure, some will be more pleasant than others. But no matter what we discover about ourselves, we must remember that in the eyes of God, there is nothing wrong with us, and there never has been.

Too often our journey of self-discovery can become a complex psychological web, with our smaller ego-self

(that place where self-serving impulses arise) becoming discouraged at its own ineptness or inability to love. The good news is that loving, whether it be of self or of another, is not its job; it is our larger God-self that fills our whole being with love. The ego need not do anything but simply allow the love to flow through. It is not by doing that love "gets done;" rather, it is by being that love simply happens.

Meditation

Falling into a place of peaceful being, let all thoughts subside. Imagine before you a beautiful crystal castle; see how it reflects all spectrums of light. Allow yourself to wander through this castle without any desire or agenda, simply being and flowing in the love emitting from the center. Let yourself be absorbed by this love, and look at your own preciousness in the same way that God looks at you.

(From) Seeing Beyond the Veil

As far as I can understand, the door of entry into this castle is prayer and meditation. . . the soul is advised to enter within itself. (IC, 31)

We are all souls with our own castles, but not all of us may desire to move from the outer to the inner court. Happy to remain on the outskirts, we do not come to know the wonderful place or the riches that wait for us on the inside. "Where their treasure is, there is their heart also" (Matt. 6:21). Attached to our preoccupations and worries, we live behind a veil of ignorance about the truth of our being.

Teresa implored us to see beyond the veil and to travel through all the royal rooms; the way of entry, she found, was through prayer and meditation. In our human evolutionary journey we have become too self-reliant and too eager to claim credit for the things we have achieved. What of divine assistance? What of divine law? We forget that beyond us is a universal force supplying life at every moment—with every breath we take, with every sun that rises and sets.

When we come to prayer with a humble heart, the door is opened much wider than when we think we are still affecting everything. Throughout her writings Teresa never tired of reminding us of the great benefits of entering into genuine humility, that is, of allowing the ego to release control. When we do this, our prayers can become pure and spontaneous thoughts of the soul, or simply a state of being where we rest rather than constant petitions for what we want.

Teresa strongly disliked repetitive prayers and voiced her displeasure at this religious ritual: “Would we give a friend so little attention?” she asked. She actively encouraged praying with thought and feeling and demanded respectful interaction with the divine, not simply uttering words out of habit or hope. She also introduced the practice of meditation to the Carmelite Order and was considered an expert on this subject, which her numerous writings attest to.

Believing herself incapable of meditation, after many attempts, Teresa (temporarily) gave up the practice. She warned against such nonsense and called for perseverance, saying that we need to release any expectation of what we think should happen and to rely on God to guide us. There are many rooms in the castle,

she reminded us, and we may be taken to any of these rooms at any time—it is not up to us to decide where we need to go. Our meditations and prayers can take us into places of deep peace, or into longing and pain; unbidden memories may surface, or feelings of lightness and grace may pervade our soul. As we journey toward the center of our being, may we be open to visiting all the rooms of our castle.

Meditation

Relax into the quietness of your being. Lay down your need to control, and agree to let the divine guide you. Breathe, and trust that you will be taken where you need to go. Breathe deeper and deeper into your being—let yourself go to wherever you are being taken.

(From) God's Gentle Reminder

*Eat for Me and sleep for Me,
And let everything you do be for Me,
As though you no longer live but I. (CW vol. I, 414)*

This journey we have embarked on never ends, not even for the angels or the saints. Every day is a new beginning, another opportunity for us to invite the spirit of God into our lives. The beauty lies in the simplicity of our task: letting this spirit guide us in everything we do. The above quote was a message from Christ to Teresa. By bringing the energy of Christ into our lives, we enter into the true power of love that transforms all it touches—most important, our own souls. This mystic reality, experienced through this

gradual spiritual metamorphosis, now becomes a normal phenomenon. We can all share in this reality, regardless of our beliefs or racial backgrounds, since love is the ultimate place of perfect being.

Teresa did not always perceive God in a clear light, even late in her life. Sometimes fears and doubts would arise, and once she grew very anxious when she considered how little she had returned for having been given so much. Very quickly her anxiousness was allayed as she was reminded of the sacred marriage. All that belonged to God also belonged to her, she was told by Christ, and anything that she requested would be given. She became aware that God was now putting her soul in command, since being committed to doing God's will, it could not do anything else, even if it wanted to. She understood that God could never be repaid for His generosity and that all that He required was to be loved.

Teresa had now entered the realm of true spiritual maturity; her own soul was divinely orchestrating her life. Yet simultaneously she was well aware that it was God who was achieving all. This is the blessed paradox of the human and divine incarnation. Without this knowledge – this ultimate act of humility—the soul remains in an illusion about its own effort. We must remember, said Teresa, that reaching this state is well beyond our own power, and if we continue making an effort on our own, we will find our love growing cold.

Teresa, coming to the end of her journey here on earth, had become totally consumed by her love for God. She wrote that she no longer felt any attachment to people or the world, and she didn't suffer the intensity of her feelings as before, including her

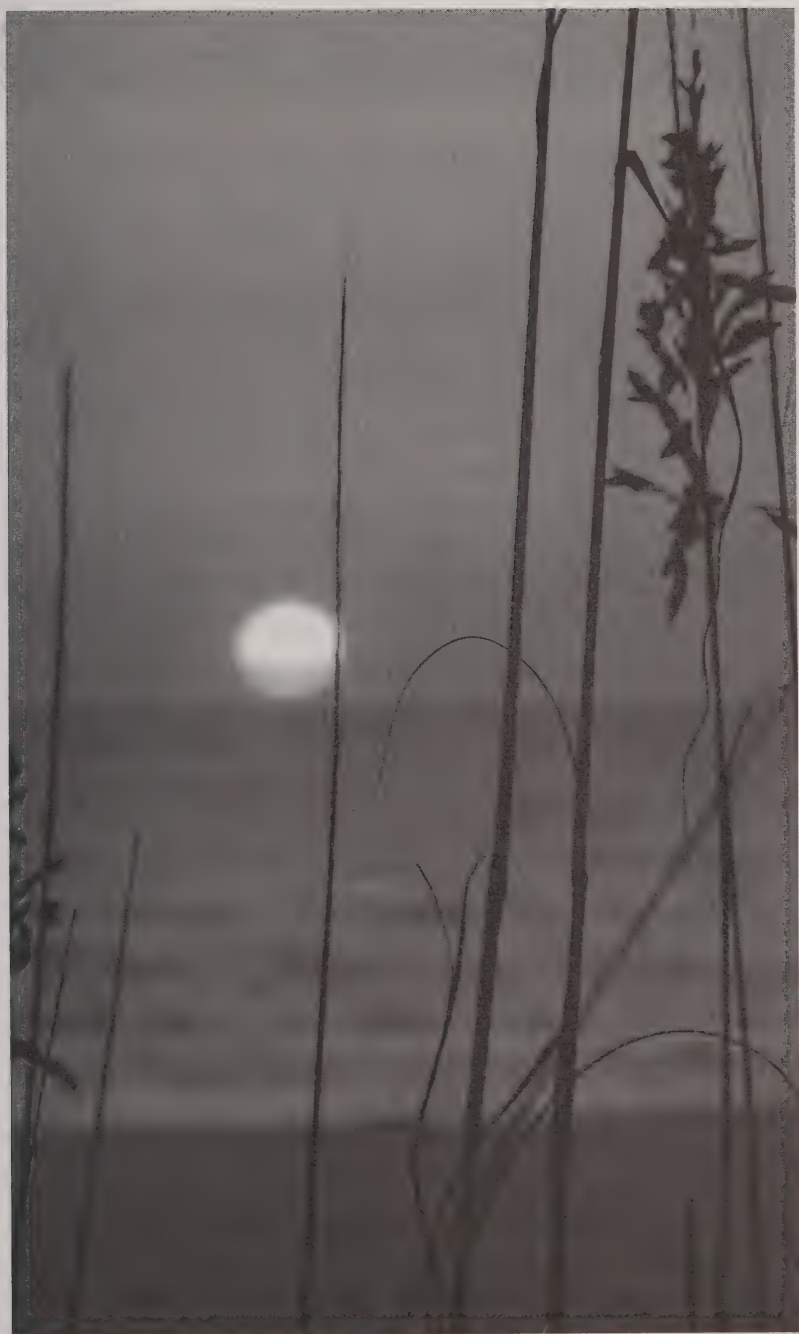
longings for God. She was no longer interested in seeking advice from others, or in giving it, and it mattered little to her whether she gained or lost anything and everything. She had reached the ultimate dwelling place of calm and peace. She was free from any desire other than to love. What has a soul to do but love more? she asked.

The knowledge that God and the soul are one is the basis of all mystical teachings. Living this knowledge, through loving every being as embodiments of the one spirit, is the perfection of these teachings. And it is through honoring and respecting each other that this love becomes manifest. May our hearts, like Teresa's, burn with love for God and for all His creation, knowing at once the greatness and the humbleness of who we are.

Meditation

Breathing deep into your being, call on the mystical grace of God. Let this grace permeate every part of your consciousness. Feel the majestic nature of who you are, and know that it is God who creates every part of your being. Allow a deep feeling of gratitude and love to rise within you. Take this love, along with honor and respect—for yourself and all beings—into the world.

Excerpted from FALLING INTO THE ARMS OF GOD by Megan Don © 2005. Reprinted with permission of New World Library. Available April 26, 2005, www.newworldlibrary.com, 800-97-BOOKS or 415-884-2100.



Lhaktong Sönam



In the Shadow of God's Wings

Susan Gregg-Schroeder



"Part of my journey has been to understand my bleakest times as times of fertile darkness. When a person begins to live into their darkness, embrace it, and even befriend it, God's presence is most often revealed. And when persons with a mental illness are able to use their faith and spirituality as a source of healing and support, they discover a renewed sense of vision, hope and possibilities for the future."

*~ Susan Gregg-Schroeder, "The Face of Depression,"
Circuit Rider, January/February 2003*

Susan Gregg-Schroeder is Coordinator of Mental Health Ministries for the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church, and is the author of In the Shadow of God's Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression. In the following excerpts from her book, Susan describes her personal journey through clinical depression, including a stay in the hospital, and how her faith and spirituality were integral to her healing and recovery. Susan leads workshops, retreats, and conferences to educate people about depression as a treatable illness, and to erase the stigma of mental illness in faith communities. She is an ordained minister and a certified pastoral care specialist. For more information and resources on how

congregations can support their members who suffer from depression and other mental illnesses, please visit Susan online at Mental Health Ministries at <http://www.mentalhealthministries.net>. Also, please know that the National Mental Health Association has designated May as Mental Health Month.

Grace in the Shadow

Grace happens! This insight came to me on a particularly difficult morning after a night of little sleep. That morning it took supreme effort on my part to crawl out of bed, shower, dress, and leave for work. As I drove along the freeway, wondering how I was going to make it through the day, I spotted a bumper sticker on the car in front of me. It contained just two words: Grace Happens. Taking this as a personal message for me, I walked into the office with a sense of expectancy instead of dread. . .

Grace often happens when we least expect it. As I look back I can see many moments when God's grace broke into my life in unexpected ways. That's what grace is all about. We can't will God's grace or control it. It comes as a gift, often when we are most vulnerable, afraid, hopeless, and alone.

One such moment occurred when my spiritual director brought me Communion during my first stay in the hospital. The sacrament of Communion has always been special to me. This ritual meal connects me to the divine and to other people. The partaking of the Communion elements mysteriously invites God's presence in the innermost part of ourselves. Usually we celebrate Communion before an elaborate altar. But

on this occasion there was no altar, or even a table, available in my sparse hospital room. Looking around, we found a trash can. We emptied the trash and turned the can upside down to use as a makeshift altar. . . The literal emptying of that trash can remains a powerful symbol. We all have trash in our lives that we need to empty and release. But some trash is hard to let go of. This is especially true of familiar yet destructive patterns of living or closely held worldviews. As the upside-down wastebasket became an altar, I experienced God's presence even in the difficult process of emptying myself. . .

* * * * *

Grace seldom comes as a profound, single, life-changing event. More often it emerges as a whisper; yet it can carry a person through the next few hours or even days: mornings when I shared bagels and coffee with a friend who listened, offerings of food when I could not begin to plan dinner for the family, phone calls that came at those low moments to lift my spirits and to remind me that I was still connected with others, the memorable sermon or church anthem that touched my soul in a way I cannot describe. Grace happens!

Gifts of the Shadow

. . . Depression is a powerful teacher if we will let it speak. Too often, however, we do not allow depression to share its gifts with us. Thomas Moore in his book *Care of the Soul* states that "If we persist in our modern way of treating depression as an illness to be cured only mechanically and chemically we may lose the gifts of soul that only depression can provide." I recall a reading



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from twentieth-century preacher Leslie Weatherhead in which he comments that most of us prefer sunlight and happiness. But Weatherhead claims that he learned more in his personal dark times than in the light. He called such learnings “treasures of the darkness,” and no one can take these treasures from us. Gifts discovered in the shadow are like “treasures of the darkness” in that they remain a part of us forever.

Gifts are least expected when the veil of darkness suddenly descends upon us. I felt stripped of everything familiar—my patterns of living and especially my ways of experiencing God’s presence. I felt lost, not knowing what direction to take; yet, at the same time, I felt helpless and immobilized to move in any direction. Depression is a bewildering experience and certainly not a time to recognize or appreciate God’s hidden work in our lives. Sandra Cronk in *Dark Night Journey* sees the dark night as time for “an intensive re-patterning of our whole being.” This drastic transformation does not occur without deep emotional pain.

The more I struggled to regain my bearings and sense of control, the deeper I descended into the darkness. Cronk goes on to say that,

Letting go of the need to control our spiritual path is especially helpful in the dark night because in these times we do not choose a path. We experience the path as given. Walking in trust, along the path that is given, is our way of saying yes to God.

When you suddenly find yourself alone and without direction, walking this path requires a trust that is difficult to come by. I tried to feel the emptiness in

search of meaning; but the harder I tried to control my emotional and spiritual life and tried to control and manipulate God, the more desolate I felt.

I learned that the darkness does not yield because we will it to do so. Rather, it becomes more intense. I was in unfamiliar territory; my predominant emotion was fear. My old patterns of behavior no longer worked, and I lost a sense of my own identity. I experienced only the void of God's absence, and a deep emptiness surrounded me.

The gifts of the shadow do not yield themselves easily. They begin to emerge from the depths only as we are willing to let go and be present to the darkness. I have found strength and solace in the many who have traveled this dark path before me. I found myself clinging to their words of consolation and hope. One particular prayer from Thomas Merton has been especially helpful.

I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

I often felt “lost and in the shadow of death.” My fears were so strong that for a long time I was numb, unable to move in the darkness. Gradually, with the encouragement and patience of my pastoral counselor, I was able to find the courage to begin to grope around in the darkness. Through this painstaking exploration of the hidden places in my soul, I began to discover that my depression was an unasked-for opportunity to explore the depths of my inner self. Deepak Chopra says, “When you embrace and become intimate with your Shadow Self, you get in touch with the totality of your Being. In that totality lies wholeness. You are holy and you are healed.”

Emerging from the Shadow

. . . Most of us would not choose to embark on a journey into the dark night of the soul. But, in retrospect, I know that my depression forced me to become an explorer, a person who needed to discover who I was and to Whom I belonged. My emergence from the shadow is an ongoing journey of self-discovery, a journey that will take the rest of my life. The journey will involve some backward steps and setbacks, but I know deep inside that my healing continues.

Susan Gregg-Schroeder is one of our frequent writers. This piece is from her book, In the Shadow of God's Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression, Upper Room Books, 1997. This book and its accompanying Group Study Guide are available at www.upperroom.org or 1-800-972-0433. Used by permission of Upper Room Books.

I L L U M I N A T I O N S



Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. . . Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.

~ *Carl Jung*

True ecstasy is the conjunction of light with light, when the human soul meets the divine light.

~ *Abdul Qadir al-Jilani*

If you want to identify me, ask me not where I live, or what I like to eat, or how I comb my hair, but ask me what I am living for, in detail, and ask me what I think is keeping me from living fully for the thing I want to live for.

~ *Thomas Merton*

It is only through letting our heart break that we discover something unexpected: the heart cannot actually *break*, it can only break *open*. . . When we feel both our love for this world and the pain of this world—together, at the same time—the heart breaks out of its shell. . . To live with an open heart is to experience life full strength.

~ *John Welwood*

I wish I could show you, when you are lonely or in darkness, the Astonishing Light of your own Being!

~ *Hafiz*

The true religion is when we live connected with the Lord. When we allow His energy to percolate through us, we become conscious instruments of the Divine.

~ *Swami Amar Jyoti*

The beating heart of the universe is holy joy.

~ *Martin Buber*

I would rather live in a world where my life is surrounded by mystery than live in a world so small that my mind could comprehend it.

~ *Henry Emerson Fosdick*

Compassion is like sunlight, awakening and bringing joy to beings. Its beauty is like a rainbow, lifting the hearts of all who see it.

~ *Tarthang Tulku*

I am equally present in all beings and show the same face to all creation; none are favored, none are hateful, and none dear. But those who love Me with brimming heart become absorbed in Me, and as they dwell in Me, I am revealed dwelling within them.

~ *Sri Krishna*

Prayer must mean putting our very soul upon our hands, offering it to God.

~ *Babylonian Talmud*

We are each of us angels with only one wing, and we can only fly by embracing one another.

~ *Luciano de Crescenzo*

P O E T R Y



Fiddleheads

*Not the lilies of the field,
but the ferns of the forest,
note how they emerge
fiddleheads first,
bowed as if in prayer
then rising toward the light*

*until, heads uplifted
they unfold as though
to praise the Lord
they too have risen toward.*

Michael S. Glaser

Michael S. Glaser is Head of the Division of Arts and Letters at St. Mary's College of Maryland where he is a professor of literature and creative writing.

Prism

*When
We gaze
Into a prism
We shall discover
The light that opens
The door of our prison
And we will infinitely see
With a rainbow of serenity
That love is the essence
Of our core*

silent lotus

silent lotus is internationally known as an artist, poet, and spiritual advisor. To see his poetry and visual art you are most welcome to visit www.silentlotus.net or email insight@silentlotus.net.

Trust

The trees
on the cliffs
are teaching us
everything.

They cannot fathom
what it is
that makes us cling
and cower.

They lean out,
standing on their toes

as if light were
the truer gravity

as if the pull of earth
were some old superstition
we might rise above

as if there were
some wider watchfulness

as if we could spin
ourselves wings
just as easily
as falling.

Deborah Gordon Cooper

Deborah Gordon Cooper has used poetry extensively in her work as a hospice/hospital chaplain and has conducted workshops on the interfacing of poetry and spirituality.

Sculpting

*Like a statue
forcing its way
out of stone,
the soul insists
on its own shape,
wearing the dust away,
assuming a luminous grace.*

Nancy Compton Williams

Praise

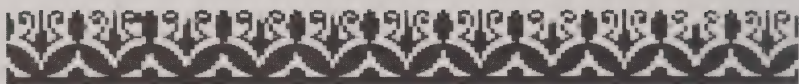
*Little Bird at daybreak
Puffing your feathers
Atop the leafless tree,
Sunbeams alight your blue crest
And warm your merry song to life.*

*You praise by being.
I, by seeing.*

Victoria Beynon

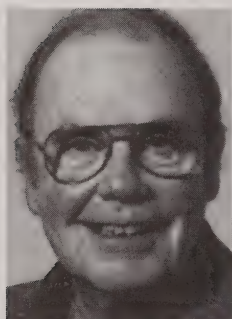
Nancy Compton Williams is a poet and teacher of poetry and serves on the editorial board for Poem.

Victoria Beynon is a writer and a chaplain emeritus with the National Association of Catholic Chaplains who is now fully occupied with her writing, her husband, four grown daughters and nine grandchildren.



Of Death and Drones

Gerald May



I've been thinking a lot about death recently. My old lymphoma returned after nearly a decade, kicking me off the heart transplant list. My heart's in bad enough shape that it can't handle much in the way of chemotherapy, and the lymphoma will kill me without treatment. Right now we're trying an antibody treatment with very few side effects, and we're hopeful. But of course I've still been thinking a lot about death.

Death itself doesn't worry me much. I honestly don't think I'm afraid of it. What bothers me is the

Gerald (Jerry) May is Senior Fellow in Contemplative Theology and Psychology for the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Bethesda, Maryland. He practiced psychiatry for 25 years and is the author of many books and articles on the relationship between spirituality and psychology, including Will and Spirit, Addiction and Grace, and The Awakened Heart. Jerry is a friend of Fellowship in Prayer and participated in our 2002 conference, "Companions on the Sacred Journey." He gave a keynote address titled "Spiritual Companionship in the Dark Night," and led a workshop on "The Unknowing Spiritual Director."

hassle of it, the pain of family and friends, enduring medical procedures and settling affairs: the complicated trappings of dying. And of course there's the ever present letting go. I'm convinced that we all live lives of continual letting go, but it never comes quite so clear as when your demise is in your face. But there's also pleasure in the midst of it—the sheer enjoyment of simple moments, the feel of a breeze, the blueness of sky, the eyes of my wife and kids, a smile here and there, laughter, good food, the taste of water when you're thirsty, all sorts of wonderful gifts.

Some of the gifts are more mysterious. Before I discovered my first lymphoma ten years ago, I had experienced several months of inexplicable gratitude. It wasn't gratitude *for* anything—it was just sheer thankfulness. Although it quieted down some over the years, that feeling of thanksgiving never really left me. This time around, the feeling is one of praise. Don't ask me why. I was never much into prayers of either thanksgiving or praise until I was given the gift of the actual feelings. Before, praise felt kind of humiliating, like "Oh God, Thou art so great and I am so lowly." But the actual feeling I've been given is nothing like that. I can't describe it, but I guess it's more like realizing how wonderful it is to exist and having to express it in some way. My praise is directed Godwards to be sure, yet there's something strange about the way it reminds me of Narcissus gazing at the beauty of his own image.

Another wonderful gift is that I've received a way of expressing that praise. It has to do with the sound of the drone. It's yet another thing I don't really understand, but for the better part of my conscious life I've been searching for the perfect drone. There's

something about a long, steadily sustained low tone underlying other sounds and music, something in that constancy that touches me more deeply than anything else I can think of. I remember playing the violin in grade school and just bowing the lowest string in the slowest way I could. It felt, and probably sounded, stupid. But it vibrated some kind of life force in me and I almost couldn't stop. Over the years, I've been drawn to Celtic and Appalachian music because of the drones of bagpipes and fiddles and the low strings of dulcimers. Later, I fell in love with Hindu chant, often sung to droning harmoniums and tablas, and the deep chant of Tibetan monks who make their own drones with impossibly low vocal intonations. I tried to play the digeridoo, but could never master that cheek-squeeze outbreath you need for steady tone.

For years I searched for a way of creating that deep, low, steady sound. A harmonium, the best dronemaker in my opinion, was too big, bulky and expensive. I experimented by making outlandish single and double-stringed instruments, plucked, bowed, and strummed. I discovered that nylon weedwhacker line makes a wonderful deep tone. But I never quite found the right placement for it. I spent months in my workshop crafting a hurdy-gurdy, which sounded wonderful but took hours to tune and adjust. I tried electronic synthesizers, and discovered that the perfect drone absolutely has to be analog. Digital sampling just doesn't work.

As I say, I can't really explain my search for the perfect drone-tone. But I think there's a hint in a meditation experience I once had. It was one of those rare, deep meditations—what Teresa of Avila might call

“active recollection”—where whatever you’re doing to attend to your attention finally “works,” and you’re just really, fully, there. This time, everything became so quiet and still that I was sure my breathing had ceased and I couldn’t help wondering if this is what it’s like when you die. At that moment, I was treated to a wonderful little vision. I seemed to see this great cosmic flow of energy, much like an endless, shoreless river, moving always but having no beginning or end, just the movement of flow. And I “saw” this little tributary flowing into the great movement, and knew that it was me. Somewhere in the past I had emerged, separated from the great flow for a time, and was now rejoining it, merging back into the whole. As I reflected on this later, I thought maybe indeed that *is* what death will be like.

That experience took place many years ago, but just recently I made the connection with the drone. Reading about East Indian spiritual music, I learned that the drone starting note of a given scale must be present and steady throughout, like a great deep flow of energy, never stopping, always providing an undergirding movement to whatever other notes may be played or sung. Suddenly I realized that what I had “seen” in my meditation was the same kind of thing I hear and feel with the drone. And maybe, if I’m right about thinking of that great energy flow as Divine, then maybe the little tributary moves along with the cosmic flow as an act of praise, making its own little flight of tones and notes and rhythms, all accenting and honoring the greatness of its Source and, thereby, reverencing itself.

That comes as close to an explanation of my drone-love as anything I’ve encountered. I don’t really *need* to

explain it, but one of the tunes this mind of mine plays is “can we figure out something about this?” And, I must confess, the attempt is most enjoyable.

The real substantive gift came with the discovery of a little wooden box about the size of a large book. It’s from India, and goes by many names: *surpeti*, *swar pethi*, *sur peti*, or most commonly, *shruti box*. It’s like a mini-harmonium with the same depth of sound, but very portable and far less expensive. Like the harmonium, it’s a free-reed instrument played with its own internal bellows. But instead of a keyboard, it simply has a few holes you can open and close to create the drone sound. It’s perfect.

During my first lymphoma treatment, a lifelong prayer was answered: to directly experience the presence of God without mediation. This time around, a lifelong search has been satisfied: to find the perfect drone. Now I find moments where I can be alone or with a group who will chant with me, and I pump those bellows and sing the names of God or the closing mantra from the *Heart Sutra* or a line from a Psalm, or something that just comes. And it nourishes my soul so deeply that I feel I could live on nothing but the chanting and it would be more delicious, more fulfilling than the best food or the cleanest air.

There is no real conclusion to this account of my experience. Maybe it reveals something about thanksgiving and praise, or living and dying, but mainly it’s just something I wanted to share.

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William Vincent



The Flowers

Sarah Shapiro



As my mother was dying far away in America, growing weaker month by month, the flowers on our porch were dying, too. It couldn't be helped. It was Israel's sabbatical year; by Jewish law, the earth lay fallow. I couldn't weed them, couldn't drown them with fertilizer to make up for my frequent absences. No one else in the family loved them as much as I; and while my mother was dying, they kept slipping my mind. I didn't love them myself.

They weren't getting fed at their appointed times: the tiny white blossoms with orange at the center were supposed to be watered every morning, before the day got hot; the pink geraniums, twice a week; the purple nasturtiums, every other day. The leaves turned yellow, then brown. I didn't care. I'd return from a trip to Los Angeles (where I'd run up my mother's long distance bill: "*Don't any of you dare take buses! Don't go anywhere!*") and after a few days would notice that the plants were starving. Who cared? The *intifada* was in

Sarah Shapiro is the author most recently of A Gift Passed Along: A Woman Looks at the World Around Her, published by Artscroll. This story may be found there as well as on the aish.com web site. She has edited several anthologies, of which The Mother in Our Lives was just published. Her stories and essays appear regularly in publications in Israel and the United States. She teaches writing workshops in Jerusalem where she lives with her family.

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full swing. Mothers were being shot as they drove to work, men had been lynched; father after father after father, gone; children were being torn out by their roots. I was losing Mommy. The land was filling with orphans. They were crying everywhere. Hands and legs were blown off. Our souls turned dry to the touch. Mothers were screaming. Blood soaked the soil.

The flowers withered, and shriveled. They said goodbye.

When the ambulances were shrieking crazily and my electrified heart jumped out of its socket whenever the children left for school; when it would have been an act of heroism or insanity to go downtown for a cappuccino and I didn't want anyone out of my sight, wanted everybody to *just stay home for crying out loud*; when there was nowhere to go but out on the porch and nowhere to turn but into our own hearts, I remembered the flowers.

My mother had died. It was *Erev Pesach*. We were turning to stone. From the porch we heard the explosions. Sometimes we saw plumes of smoke. The kitchen cabinets had turned white with bleach and our hands were turning red. I stole out of the house. I wanted to forget. I wanted the flower boxes to overflow.

The Russian woman behind the counter dispensed instructions: these, she said, you have to water only when the soil gets dry to the touch, and these, every day; these can get direct sunlight, but these just light, no sun. As she rang up twelve plants and a big bag of moist black dirt, the infants stood in their innocence before me, their tightly shut blossoms all in a row, their glossy, small leaves like green hearts, and my heart sprouted hope. "What do you think of all this?" I asked her, gesturing out the store window to Jerusalem, and the sky. She

shrugged. "The world likes us more now, don't you think," I said, "now that we're being killed?" She smiled.

Back home, it took all morning to complete the transplanting. It was hot out there on the porch. Inside, everyone else in the family was scrubbing away. When I finished, I sneaked off to take a nap. . . a deep, deep sleep. I wanted to dream about my mother but she didn't show. When I woke, I went out to check if any of them had blossomed.

Not yet.

The sky was so intensely gentle, and the evening breeze like a mother's caress.

Just as we sat down for the Seder, the world echoed with thunder as if we were being bombed. Lightning flashed and crashed around us. How strange, in this season. Hail shot down like bullets. We read: *These are the ten plagues which the Holy One, Blessed is He, brought upon the Egyptians: blood, frogs, vermin, wild beasts, pestilence, boils, hail. . . In every generation, it is each person's duty to regard himself as though he personally had gone out of Egypt.* How would they fare out there in the punishing downpour, my little blossoms, out in the cold? At dawn I paid them a visit. They were wilting, but hadn't been destroyed. "They're so fragile," I said. "I wonder why they don't die."

"Because they don't fight against the rain," said my husband.

When the holiday departed, we turned on the radio and heard about a suicide bombing in Netanya.

My flowers blossomed and bloomed and multiplied and died and budded, the endless unfolding of sheer, unnecessary beauty a synonym for God's extravagant kindness. Sharon entered Ramallah and the suicide

bombings stopped. What joy! Just to be alive! Back in the store, I got more dirt, more plants. I told the Russian woman that I wanted tiny white blossoms, the kind that spread. She nodded. I was probably one of her best customers. I said, "I get so mad reading the paper, what the world is saying about us. Thank God for the flowers. They're cheaper than a therapist."

"Yes, I know. My son, too. He's thirty-one. He was in Jenin last week. A reservist. He sees CNN, he reads the paper. He gets so furious at what they say, he is furious at their ludicrous stories. He doesn't know what to do with himself. He's jumping out of his skin. I tell him, this is the power of a lie. Why watch it? This one looks not so good," she said, pointing to a wilting white pansy. "You can have it for free. My son and I, ever since we got here eleven years ago, always, this terrorism. If not for that, we would live with them. Why not? Have a state next door, who cares?"

The tiniest flowers opened their secret faces, petal by petal, and greeted me. The black loss of my mother kept blossoming over and over again, new buds born amidst long-buried memories. Spring doesn't die. Once, as I was watering the weak one, the pansy, the runt of the litter, I remembered something in the paper, that in one of the bombings, a few blocks from our apartment, a father found his son on the street and kneeled over him crying, "Don't die! Daddy loves you! Don't die!" But he died. Lo and behold, the pansy bloomed.

What magnificent mornings! We've set up the porch table, put up the umbrella. I make myself cappuccino, or something like it, and drift through all the bad news in the morning paper. The sunshine dapples the trees, the flowers are smiling, and after all, isn't it in Psalms? *Truth will come out of the ground.*





Louise Hunter



Asylum: A Place to Grow in Prayer

Connie Clark



In the chapel at the state psychiatric hospital—once known as the Insane Asylum—the dull squares of stained glass in the windows block most of the light. The yellowish walls need washing, or repainting, but government budgets keep a tight rein on decorating. Two mass-produced banners hang at the front of the chapel, announcing in gaudy colors that this is the season of Christmas. Actually, it is now Epiphany, but we don't have any banners for Epiphany.

For six years now, I have been ministering in places like this. I am the chaplain, the keeper of the chapel, and the designated God-person to whom patients can turn with spiritual concerns. Before coming to Wyoming, where I now serve, I worked in a state hospital in northern Virginia. In both places, I have gratefully received the spiritual insights of people with severe mental illness, and I have also witnessed their suffering. I have learned that no matter how unlikely the setting is, how tawdry the chapel's furnishings are, how mistrustful of religion the professional staff may

Connie Clark is a psychiatric hospital chaplain and was a full-time freelance writer for twenty years. Currently a candidate for Holy Orders in the Episcopal Church, she lives with her husband and their three dogs in a small Wyoming town where moose and antelope can be seen regularly within city limits.

be, God's Spirit never hesitates to be present among us —among, that is, those who have eyes to see and ears to hear; those who seek and find God in the midst of persistent pain, loneliness, poverty, and discrimination.

I have learned, too, about the real power of prayer. This is ironic, since before becoming a chaplain, I trained to be a spiritual director. I led retreats and quiet days and contemplative prayer groups. I also co-authored a book about the healing power of prayer with a physician. I was, you might say, a prayer professional. But the person who prays, and who dares to talk about prayer publicly and mentor others in their spiritual lives, should know from the start that her task is like that of the astronaut: There is so much space to cover and explore, so much you cannot know. There is no end, in fact, to your ignorance about the ways of God with God's people. But thankfully, there also seems to be no end to God's mercy.

I have prayed with patients hundreds, maybe thousands, of times. I have designed and led about 300 worship services. But perhaps most important to my own development as a person of prayer, I have learned to turn to God more quickly and with greater trust than I ever did before becoming a chaplain. I have learned to pray while holding the glasses of a young "psych tech" (nursing assistant) as he and five other men tried to subdue a patient who held a black belt in karate and who was psychotic and angry. I have prayed as another patient ran from the chapel bellowing after striking a fellow patient while we sang "God Will Take Care of You." ("It was just too much," he said later, apologetically.) I have prayed in frustration at the incomprehensible decisions made by administrators

who seem to know nothing about how hospitals actually operate. And I have prayed when, twenty minutes before the Sunday service was to begin, I found vicious, hateful graffiti carved into the pulpit desk.

These are the kinds of occasions for prayer that people might expect if they ever thought about the work of a psychiatric hospital chaplain. They probably wouldn't anticipate the moments of great joy and gratitude that lead to praise and rejoicing. For some reason known to God alone, people with severe mental illness—people who have suffered acutely, often for many years—seem to experience the presence of God's Spirit more vividly, and respond in faith more wholeheartedly, than those of us who do not bear the crosses of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder or major depression or severe addiction or personality disorders or any combination of the above. My congregations in the chapel worship with exuberance. They treasure their Bibles and often read to me from them. They hear from God, and not just in the form of delusions, and they usually know the difference. They are generous to a fault and race to minister to one another.

The Bible tells us that God chooses to dwell among people who are judged to be weak and foolish by the powers of this world. Patients in state psychiatric institutions bear those judgments and live with enormous stigma. I do not believe God wants them to suffer or to be despised by the world; I do not know why God allows them to experience such pain. But I do know God is with them, and I thank God all the time for letting me be a part of their lives.

This morning in chapel, one man sobbed as if his heart was broken and would never mend. When I went

over to embrace him, I asked him what was wrong. "The father has died, and the son will have to take his place," he said, weeping inconsolably. I don't know if he was referring to God and Jesus, or to some other father-son pair. From what I know of this man's life, he wasn't thinking of himself or his own child. Whatever the focus, his grief was very real. Throughout the service, he wept aloud. First one patient, then another, would go over to him and give him a hug. When it came time to ask for prayers for individuals in need, several patients asked me to pray for him. Yet another escorted him, arm-in-arm, out to the men's room and back.

When we gathered around the altar for the Lord's Supper, I stood next to my friend Steve Aaron, a priest from my church who comes to the chapel to celebrate the Eucharist with us about once a month. Steve was praying the prayer of consecration, in which we tell the story of the first Eucharist and ask God's blessing on the bread and juice, and on us. My mind wandered during this long-ish prayer. I was thinking about a book I'd read in which the author quoted a priest as saying that we hope there is life after death, but we can't know, and that all of our belief that God is benevolent and loving is also hope, not knowledge. I understand that there is truth in these statements, but I was discouraged to read of a priest being so vague and doubtful when consulted by a person seeking consolation and a reason to trust and believe in God.

This all passed through my mind in a flash as I stood at the altar, half-listening to the familiar words about Jesus, the bread of life. At that same instant, Sally, an elderly woman who has been in the hospital most of her life, interrupted Steve's prayers. With authority, and

with a hand movement that looked very much like a gesture of blessing, Sally said: "Death isn't anything. Death is just another life." My heart lifted, and a huge grin painted my face. Once again, God had spoken through God's beloved people, in the run-down, outdated, poorly equipped chapel, among the addicts and the formerly homeless and the one-time prostitute and the hopelessly ill and the chaplain who used to think she really had it down about prayer. Once again, God's mercy poured forth, and we took the bread and the cup, and we said, "The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in eternal life," in the life we live now and the life we'll live then, when we know without doubt that death isn't anything, just another life, just another occasion for prayer and jubilation.



William Vincent

P R A Y E R S



Now the Light Comes

Now the light comes,
the light that makes me one with all life.
Let me be like a ray of light,
like a flower blazing with light,
like the waterfall laughing with light,
like the great tree also,
mighty in its roots that split the rocks,
mighty in its head that reaches the sky.
And its leaves catch the light
and sing with the wind a song of the circle.
Let my life be like the rainbow,
whose colors teach us unity.
Let me follow always the great circle,
the roundness of power,
one with the moon and the sun,
and the ripple of waters. . .

Native American Morning Song

Always You

First when I was apart from You,
this world did not exist,
nor any other.

Second, whatever I was looking for
was always You.

Third, why did I ever learn to count to three?

Jelaluddin Rumi

Skies Full of Promise

God of life, there are days when the burdens we carry
chafe our shoulders and wear us down; when the road
seems dreary and endless, the skies gray and
threatening; when our lives have no music in them and
our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their
courage. Flood the path with light, we beseech you; turn
our eyes to where the skies are full of promise.

Saint Augustine

BOOK REVIEWS



FALLING INTO THE ARMS OF GOD:

Meditations With Teresa of Avila

by Megan Don

New World Library, April 2005

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Falling into the Arms of God makes the life and work of Saint Teresa of Avila accessible to a contemporary audience. Simply written, it allows deep spiritual truths to be accessed and incorporated into daily living, with particular emphasis on integrating contemplative and active practices.

St. Teresa had the unique ability to blend a rich mystical inner life with the practical skills required for everyday living. Despite her status in the spiritual community, like many seekers, she often struggled with self-doubt, fear, and lack of validation by others. Through sheer perseverance, she became a living example of what it means to be simultaneously one with God, self, and the outer world.

Falling into the Arms of God begins with a brief introduction to St. Teresa's life, including biographical information drawn from Megan Don's studies and travels to the monastery in Spain. The body of the book contains meditations divided into "seven dwellings," as described in St. Teresa's mystical writings. St. Teresa described the soul as a clear crystal castle with many

rooms, or dwellings, to be entered as one seeks the inner mansion, the dwelling place of God. Each passage is accompanied by an explanation of the lessons it may hold for today's reader, and a suggestion for guided meditation.

This book is instrumental in reviving the wisdom of the Christian mystical tradition and making it available to all, regardless of religious or spiritual affiliation. It teaches spiritual maturity—through the time-honored practice of surrender and humility.

For information on the author, Megan Don, and for excerpts from this book, see page 4 of this journal.

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END PIECE



Gleaning

Evelyn Frank Hanna

When I wore my coat after she borrowed it,
my hand found the pockets crammed
with trash or treasures she'd deemed
worth hoarding. I hurried
the coat to the cleaners and walked home cold,
dismayed by her intrusion, by her messy presence
pursuing me into private spaces.

Now her every pocket, every purse and knitting bag
yields hard candies nested in old hankies, ready
for the throat that will not be soothed. Coins,
snips of yarn, bundles of postcards await her hand
that will not gather them again. This gleaning is my duty
now. I duly touch the remnants, cleaning and sorting,
disposing or keeping. I handle what she accumulated,
hear her stories whispered, cull memories
from the mess I once thought so vexing. I bestow
my tears upon her sewing scissors, wishing
I hadn't made it so hard for her,
when she was living, to garner
this forgiveness.

Evelyn Frank Hanna's poetry has been published in numerous journals and her work has been honored in several contests.

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